

VALIDITY OF TEST OF OBJECT RELATIONS (TOR) – BASIC INFORMATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS

(unpublished and not lectured version – work in progress)

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The Test of Object Relations was built according to Loevinger's (1957) model of test development. That means that the test is built upon theory and that validity is built in the process of development of test. The test was developed in three main phases of validation: theoretical-substantive, internal-structural and external-criterion. The first two phases of development are described in the main article published in Psychological Horizons (Zvelc, 1998b).

1. THEORETICAL-SUBSTANTIVE

At the beginning of the development of the test we defined the basic dimensions of object relatedness. That was based primarily on major object relations theorists (from Winnicot, Fairbairn, Klein, Mahler, Kernberg, Kohut, Blanck & Blanck, Masterson...). We compared different theoretical frameworks and relying on our clinical practice defined basic dimensions of object relations which the most object relation theorist's describe. The 6 basic dimensions are: Symbiotic merging, Social isolation, Separation Anxiety, Narcissism, Fear of engulfment, Egocentricity. All these dimensions are found in most writings of object relations theorist (even if they don't use the same name) and are useful concepts for use in clinical practice.

In the next phase we wrote 300 items reflecting on 6 dimensions of object relations. The items were based on clinical experience and theory of object relations. These items were carefully reviewed in team with other psychologists – the aim was that they are clear, simple and understandable also for not good educated people. We selected the items and we had now 214 items which went in the next step of development.

In the fourth phase of theoretical validation the goal was to investigate if these items really reflect the 6 dimensions of object relatedness or they refer to other concepts. The aim was the selection of items which will be the best representative of six dimensions of object relatedness. We made a simple experiment. We gave 214 items to four object relations psychotherapists – experts (3 clinical psychologists and one psychiatrist). They all had good knowledge of the theory and work therapeutically from object relations perspective.

Every expert evaluated every item and sorted it in dimension, which he thought it describes. The items which were sorted in a 'correct' dimension by at least three experts were taken in the next phase of validation. Items were also pondered with points based on the level of how much the item is a good representative of a dimension.

Each item got:

3 points: if expert selected that the item represents only the 'correct' dimension

2 points: if expert selected that the item represents also other dimensions, but the 'correct' dimension was assigned as dominant

3 points: if expert selected that the item refers also to other dimension and did not select the 'correct' dimension as dominant

With these process we got 193 items which are good representative of basic six dimensions.

114 of 193 items got 12 points – that means that all experts agreed that these items describe only one dimension of object relatedness.

2) INTERNAL-STRUCTURAL VALIDATION

We conducted a research aimed at selection of items that would satisfy theoretical and also psychometric criteria (Zvelc, 1998b). In the research participated 118 university students (age from 18 till 36). They all completed the first version of Test of Object Relations, which at that point consisted of 193 items. All these items already went through the theoretical-substantive phase of validation and were found to be theoretically valid by at least three experts in object-relations theory.

a) Selection of items

We made the selection of the items with the help of the procedure Reliabilities (SPSS for Windows, ver 6.0). Selection of the items was conducted in subsequent steps which incorporated psychometric as well as theoretical criteria (see also Jackson (1970, 1971).

1. Phase of selection

In the first phase we analyzed the corrected correlations of each item with its ‘maternal¹’ scale. If the correlation was smaller than 0,20, the item was eliminated. These correlations were not significant and contributed to low internal consistency of the scale.

2. Phase of selection

In the second phase we were interested in correlations of each item with non-maternal scales. If the item correlated higher with the total score of the non-maternal scale than with the maternal scale, the item was eliminated. These procedure helps to establish convergent and discriminant validity of the scale (Jackson, 1970).

3. Phase of selection

In these phases we acknowledge both the theoretical and psychometric criteria for selection. If the corrected correlation of each item with the maternal scale was low (0,20-0,30) and was also theoretically weak (7-9 points), we eliminated it. We were also careful that items represented the whole continuum of dimension. Because of that we kept some items which were theoretically very important even if they didn’t have very strong correlation with the maternal scale. We were also attentive about inter-item correlations - we eliminated items which had very strong correlations and were also theoretically very similar.

After described selection of the items we got 90 items which satisfied theoretical as well the psychometric criteria. We also wrote additional 5 items to reflect the social desirability and random answering.

b) Reliability of the Test of Object Relations

1.) Internal consistency (See Instructions for use)

¹ Maternal scale is a scale for which the item was written.

2.) Test-retest reliability (unpublished results)

We conducted a research on 21 students (13 man and 8 female). They completed Test of Object Relations in three week interval.

Test-retest reliability for each scale was:

Symbiotical merging: 0,76
Separation Anxiety: 0,84
Narcissizem: 0,92
Egocentricity: 0,65
Fear of Engulfment: 0,84
Social Isolation: 0,65

We are currently conducting studies of reliability on other populations.

3.) EXTERNAL VALIDATION

The first published study which speaks about the external validity of the TOR was the article 'Object relations among the drug addicts' (Zvelc, 2000). The research compared 90 patients on methadone and 90 people from control group, equated with gender, age and education. The Test of Object Relations showed that patients on methadone have significantly higher scores on all scales of object relations. The findings are consistent with theoretical and clinical observations of many object relations writers.

Another study which speaks about the external validity of the TOR came from the research investigating the impact of psychotherapy on the group of volunteers (Kobal, 2001). The Test of Object Relations was used before the psychotherapy treatment, immediately after the treatment and one month ahead. The research showed that the Test of Object Relations is very useful in measuring the effects of the psychotherapy.

At the moment we have conducted a major research project for further validation of TOR. We are currently investigating the results and interpreting data. The TOR was used together with many other instruments which measure theoretically related constructs (personality disorders, parental representations measured with Parental bonding inventory, separation from parents, clinical diagnoses, self concept, big-five dimensions of personality...). We are also developing the norms for clinical population.

Currently there is also lots of research going on with TOR by different authors on different populations (sexual offenders, pregnant woman, people in family therapy, eating disorders...). Studies are not published yet.

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